Amendments to the Claims:

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) Valve assembly for load pressure-independent control of consumers ~~(4)~~, including a main valve ~~(10)~~ for regulating a pressure medium flow to or from the consumer, wherein in a pressure medium flow path between a work port ~~(A)~~ and the main valve ~~(10)~~ a shut-off valve ~~(18)~~ is arranged which permits a pressure medium flow to the work port ~~(A)~~ and which is capable of being controlled open in the opposite direction through the intermediary of a pilot valve ~~(20)~~, characterized in that a pilot piston ~~(24)~~ of the pilot valve ~~(20)~~ is capable of being raised from a pilot control seat ~~(138)~~ by displacing a main slide ~~(12)~~ of the main valve ~~(10)~~.

2. (Currently Amended) Valve assembly in accordance with Claim 1, wherein there is formed on the main slide ~~(12)~~ a tappet ~~(22)~~ capable of being taken into contact against the pilot piston ~~(24)~~.

3. (Currently Amended) Valve assembly in accordance with Claim 2, wherein the tappet ~~(22)~~ is formed on an insert member ~~(144)~~ inserted in an end face of the main slide ~~(12)~~.

4. (Currently Amended) Valve assembly in accordance with Claim 1 ~~any one of the preceding claims~~, wherein the valve axis of the pilot valve ~~(20)~~ is arranged at a parallel distance from the axis of the shut-off valve ~~(18)~~ and about coaxially with the axis of the main valve ~~(10)~~.

5. (Currently Amended) Valve assembly in accordance with Claim 1 ~~any one of the preceding claims~~, wherein the pilot valve ~~(20)~~ and the shut-off valve ~~(18)~~ are arranged in a common valve housing ~~(38)~~ that is added on to an end face of a valve disc ~~(36)~~ accommodating the main valve ~~(10)~~.

6. (Currently Amended) Valve assembly in accordance with Claim 5, wherein at least one work port ~~(A)~~ is formed at the valve housing ~~(38)~~.

7. (Currently Amended) Valve assembly in accordance with Claim 1 ~~any one of the preceding claims~~, wherein a spring chamber ~~(105)~~ of the shut-off valve ~~(18)~~ is capable of being connected via the pilot valve ~~(20)~~ with a low-pressure port, preferably a control port ~~(a)~~ conducting the control pressure that acts on the main slide ~~(12)~~ in a direction away from the pilot valve ~~(20)~~.

8. (Currently Amended) Valve assembly in accordance with Claim 7, wherein the pilot piston ~~(24)~~ includes fine-control notches ~~(139)~~ for gradually opening the connection to the low-pressure port ~~(a)~~.

9. (Currently Amended) Valve assembly in accordance with Claim 1 ~~any one of the preceding claims~~, wherein the shut-off valve ~~(18)~~ is followed downstream by a pressure/anti-cavitation valve ~~(28)~~.

10. (Currently Amended) Valve assembly in accordance with Claim 9, wherein a port of the pressure/anti-cavitation valve ~~(28)~~ is connected via a tank bore ~~(112)~~ with a

tank port ~~(T)~~, the tank bore ~~(112)~~ encompassing a housing cartridge ~~(92)~~ of the shut-off valve ~~(18)~~ as an annular chamber ~~(116)~~.

11. (Currently Amended) Valve assembly in accordance with Claim 1 ~~any one of the preceding claims~~, wherein there is associated to the main slide ~~(12)~~ at least one reset spring means ~~(14)~~ acting, after a predetermined initial stroke ~~(S)~~ of the main slide ~~(12)~~, contrary to the actuation force necessary for actuation of the pilot piston ~~(24)~~.

12. (Currently Amended) Valve assembly in accordance with Claim 11, wherein the reset spring means ~~(14)~~ comprises a reset spring ~~(68)~~ supported on a spring cup ~~(76)~~ that enters into contact against a contact shoulder ~~(80)~~ following the initial stroke ~~(S)~~.

13. (Currently Amended) Valve assembly in accordance with Claim 5 ~~Claim 5 and 10~~, wherein the housing cartridge ~~(92)~~ merges into a work passage ~~(26)~~ of the valve disc ~~(36)~~.

14. (Currently Amended) Valve assembly in accordance with Claim 5, wherein with the aid of the main valve ~~(10)~~ a variable metering throttle ~~(82)~~ is formed, downstream from which a pressure compensator ~~(16)~~ accommodated in the valve disc ~~(36)~~ is arranged.